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ENG 4752-001: Neglected Shakespeares

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ENGLISH 4752 – “NEGLECTED SHAKESPEARES”

Spring 2007 / Section 001
W 6-8:30 PM
Coleman Hall 3150

Dr. Chris Wixson
Coleman Hall 3871
Office Hours 1-2:30 MW
(Or by appointment)

“Every age creates its own Shakespeare.”
-Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare After All

“What we learn from Shakespeare is how rich life can be if you have access to the language.”
-William Hutt, Actor

Ben Jonson’s epitaph, memorializing Shakespeare as “not for an age but for all time” has proven prophetic; since the mid-1590s, there has not been a time when Shakespeare has not been celebrated, his reputation growing steadily through the centuries. In the mid and late nineteenth century, “Bardolatry” was so intense that it gave Leo Tolstoy and George Bernard Shaw fits. Tolstoy, in reaction, said that reading the Bard made him feel “repulsion, weariness and bewilderment.” Shaw maintained, “I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his.” But the Shakespeare juggernaut kept right on rolling. Not, however, without some bumps along the way. Some of his greatest works were rewritten to appeal to changing tastes (Romeo and Juliet survive! Cordelia cheats death and marries Edgar! Etc.). Other plays were neglected due to what were perceived as irredeemable “flaws” in character, plot, structure, and theme, only to find themselves “rediscovered” in the modern period when their darker sensibilities found greater resonance. These “lost” plays, that so rarely find their way to the stage or even to the college classroom, are exciting, brilliant, insightful, and beautiful, all qualities that belie their overlooked status. In any case, the existence of so-called “minor” Shakespeare begs the question of what is major and how have these distinctions shaped our sense of the Bard. In other words, how are our assumptions challenged about what is (and is not) “Shakespearean” by exploring these works?

It is always a treat to live in his language for entire semester. Hopefully, your presence in the course already indicates an enthusiasm for Shakespeare’s work as well as some grounding in the usual suspects among the plays. This is important for a couple of reasons. One, the plays we read in this course tend towards much more obscure and dense language than those that generally appear in classrooms. So having had some solid practice with the more accessible stuff is helpful. Two, in addition to analyzing these lesser known plays on their own, we will be discussing how thematic strands and choices made in them relate to those made in the canonical works and connect to ways in which Shakespeare has been reified as a cultural institution. Plays with which you should be generally familiar already include *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*. The course approaches these plays as both literary *and* theatrical texts, discussing not only their political, historical, and modern implications but also their potential for acting, directorial, and technical choices. Toward that end, we will also be analyzing videotaped productions, film versions, as well as live performances whenever possible. The complexity of these plays in terms of language, style, and thematics makes this course both reading and thinking intensive. It has a demanding assignment schedule that necessitates time and planning in order to pass this course. Due to its class size, we will run the course as an advanced seminar.

Required Textbooks: *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Bevington
The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare, 2nd Edition Russ McDonald
The Duchess of Malfi, John Webster

Attendance

Mandatory.

If you become suddenly ill (think Bubonic plague) or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me or a member of the seminar as soon as possible and stay in touch. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

Class Participation

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations; everyone simply must contribute. Participation in a seminar means careful preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, and engaged critical thought. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials and your projects. In addition to your short weekly response paper, what else you bring to share need not be written out but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic or questions. In addition, you may also wish to read the introductions to our plays, although I would advise doing so AFTER you have read each play; consider this sentence a formal spoiler alert.

Besides preparation, class participation also means **responding** constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and other seminarians. I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.

If you plan on doing any of the following things, you should probably drop this class:

1. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence by saying you are 'just the type of person who likes to sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say.' Certainly, listening is a premium in this class and is a crucial human skill. But real listening only happens in an exchange. Letting everyone else do the talking means that you're not really listening because you are busy keeping yourself safe. Of course, this 'safety' is an illusion.
2. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence because you assume that you don't know enough to participate in class and other people (especially those who talk) do. To approach the class and the work in a way that suggests that one can speak only about what is already known is not only dangerous, but it's also intellectually lazy.

3. Complaining when everyone does talk that it's a waste of time and inefficient. Or remaining so married to ways you have been taught in other courses and disciplines that you see as a 'tangent' any meaningful, principled discussion that doesn't necessarily mention the word "theme" or "symbolism." Just because the normative educational culture of a nation afraid more than anything else that its students will learn to think divides classroom activity into binaries of 'on-task' and 'off-task' doesn't mean that that is a useful or even humane way of doing things.

I will serve as a resource and guide and occasionally cranky curmudgeon, but it's your class to shape and energize. Individually and collectively, this course carries with it a responsibility to drive the inquiry and conversation.

Other Sundry Matters

****If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.**

Late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "0."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

Plagiarism

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). We will discuss how to avoid it. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Judicial Affairs Office.

Email

You should get into the habit of checking your email daily. There will be a class list on which I will post changes in assignments (if they arise), course-related announcements, and ideas that expand upon what happens in class or provides some direction for next week's reading. This list is also a great way for all of us to interact outside of class; that is to say, if you have a question or query (Shakespearean in nature), the miracle of technology offers us a way to discuss and address it.

Conferences

I am regularly available to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or by appointment and expect members of the course to drop by periodically to touch base with me on papers and projects for the course. To make an appointment, speak to me after class or contact me via email.

Grading

Shorter Paper	10%	Performance	10%
Longer Critical Paper	20%	Group Hosting	20%
Final Exam	20%	Class Participation /Weekly responses	20%

****You must complete all assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

Assignments:

- *Two critical papers that are engaged, engaging, and articulate. The first will be a *Notes and Queries*-style assignment which will be presented at the English Studies conference on Saturday, April 14th. For the second, undergraduate students are required to submit a paper 6-8 pages in length. Graduate students must submit a conference-length essay (10-12 pages). The topics of which must be developed in consultation with me.
- *Weekly response papers no longer than two pages, except on the days you “host”
- *Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion --- defined as TALKING productively
- *Group “hosting” of one play
- *Active, Engaged Participation in Performance – defined as TAKING risks
- *Final Exam

Schedule of Assignments

THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

January	10	Course Introduction Re-reading “Words, words, words” in <u>Hamlet</u>
	17	Marjorie Garber’s “Shakespeare After All” Linda Charnes’ <u>Titus Andronicus</u> Acts 1-3.1 / Sonnet #
	24	<u>Titus Andronicus</u> / <u>Love’s Labour’s Lost</u>
	31	<u>Love’s Labour’s Lost</u> / <u>Measure for Measure</u>

February	7	<u>Measure for Measure</u>
	14	Performance Session / Critical Paper #1 Due
	21	<u>All's Well That Ends Well</u>
	28	<u>Troilus and Cressida</u> Host Group A
March	7	<u>The Two Noble Kinsmen</u> Host Group B

HAPPY SPRING BREAK!!!!!!

	21	Critical Paper #2 Proposal Due
	28	<u>Coriolanus</u> Group C
April	4	<u>The Winter's Tale</u> Host Group D
	11	<u>Antony and Cleopatra</u> Host Group E
**Saturday, April 14th – English Studies Conference 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM		
	18	<u>The Duchess of Malfi</u>
	25	Second Critical paper Due / Abstract Presentations

****Final Exam TBA**